



California Regional Water Quality Control Board Central Coast Region



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CHANGES IN BASIN PLAN CRITERIA FOR ONSITE WASTEWATER SYSTEMS (ADOPTED BY THE CENTRAL COAST WATER BOARD MAY 9, 2008)

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BASIN PLAN CHANGES: Resolution No. R3-2008-0005 was adopted to update and revise existing Basin Plan criteria for siting, design, management and maintenance of onsite wastewater systems. Most of the revisions provide clarifying language to existing requirements. However, some revisions replace discretionary language of recommendations (should) with mandatory language of requirements (shall). Language in the Basin Plan will be strengthened and clarified in a manner expected to result in improved long-term water quality protection in areas served by onsite wastewater systems. The revisions are also expected to improve consistency and customer service by reducing the need for subjective interpretation of imprecise language. The significant revisions and justification are summarized below. These changes are not part of the Basin Plan until approved by the State Water Board and Office of Administrative Law.

Proposed Revision	Basin Plan Section	Justification
Streamlined definition of the term "watercourse".	VIII.D.	Existing definition (from Webster's Dictionary) led to confusion regarding alternate meanings of the term. New definition is a simplified portion of existing definition.
Narrative discussion of the benefits resulting from corrective actions for existing systems is deleted and specific criteria incorporated into revised sections.	VIII.D.1.	Narrative format made identification of specific requirements and recommendations difficult to interpret. Revised format provides for easily identifiable criteria for existing onsite systems.
Onsite management plans (developed and implemented by local jurisdictions) are recommended in existing criteria, and required in revisions.	VIII.D.1.b.	Onsite systems need to be managed and tracked, and a management plan is an appropriate vehicle. See description below.
Contents of onsite management plans are expanded from general description currently listed in the Basin Plan.	VIII.D.1.b.	Outline of onsite management plan contents included to assist local jurisdiction in developing effective plans, specific contents based upon U.S. EPA guidance.
New requirement added for additional treatment for onsite discharges to very fast percolating soils (<1 minute per inch).	VIII.D.2.a.11 and 24.	Very fast percolating soils do not provide for adequate biological treatment prior to discharge into underlying groundwater. Therefore nutrient reduction needed to protect groundwater must occur in the treatment unit.
Requirement added calling for onsite disposal systems on slopes greater than 20% to be designed by certified professional.	VIII.D.2.a.12.	Increased development in steeper areas (challenging for onsite disposal) increases concern regarding slope stability and hydraulics. Accordingly, such systems require professional expertise.
Prohibition of onsite disposal within areas subject to 10-year flood zone is revised to 25-year flood zone.	VIII.D.2.a.14.	Increased development in flood prone areas and projected long-term use of onsite disposal systems calls for a greater margin of safety.
New prohibition limiting onsite disposal in fill unless specifically designed as a disposal area.	VIII.D.2.a.25.	Prohibition added to prevent leachate from onsite disposal surfacing at interface of fill and native soil.
New prohibition limiting onsite disposal of self-regenerating water softener brine unless such disposal is consistent with salts minimization plan.	VIII.D.2.f.5.	Salts discharged to onsite systems migrate (virtually untreated) into underlying groundwater and must be minimized to protect groundwater quality.

WHY UPDATE WAS NEEDED: Typically (over the past 25 years), local jurisdictions have been unwilling to implement actions beyond those specifically required. As a result, thousands of onsite wastewater disposal systems have been permitted and installed without any means of evaluating resulting water quality impacts. When problems are identified, significant impacts may have already occurred and corrective actions are expensive. Also, implementation of the Basin Plan criteria has demonstrated revisions are needed to clarify vague language. Conventional onsite systems should be “fool proof:” simple design, simple installation, and simple operation. The Basin Plan criteria for onsite systems are intended to ensure ongoing water quality protection despite the simple nature of most onsite systems. The Basin Plan currently recommends that permitting agencies prepare and implement wastewater management plans. However, only one county within the Central Coast Region has developed an approved onsite wastewater management plan since the recommendation was incorporated into the Basin Plan in 1983. The new criteria require development and implementation of onsite management plans to investigate and mitigate existing and potential future water quality issues resulting from continued use of onsite systems.

WHO MIGHT BE EFFECTED: Individuals, businesses and local governing agencies designing, constructing, using, maintaining or permitting onsite wastewater systems in the Central Coast Region.

IMPLEMENTATION POLICY: State law requires submittal of a report of waste discharge (application) and issuance of waste discharge requirements (permits) by the Water Board prior to discharging waste, such as that from an onsite wastewater system (California Water Code Sections 13260 & 13264). Water Code Section 13269 allows the Water Board to waive these regulatory provisions provided such waivers do not exceed five years, are consistent with applicable state or regional water quality control plans, and are in the public interest. Historically, the Water Board entered into MOUs with permitting agencies to implement the Basin Plan criteria and comply with state law. Until 2004, the MOUs served as waivers of Water Board permits for onsite systems. However, all such waivers expired in 2004, leaving onsite systems subject to individual permitting (a cumbersome and redundant oversight). Water Board staff is currently in the process of developing proposed implementation policy, including a policy for waiving individual permit requirements for onsite systems sited, designed, managed and maintained in a manner consistent with Basin Plan criteria. This policy will provide local control to agencies that implement the Basin Plan.

Assembly Bill 885 (adopted in 2000) requires the State Water Board (in consultation with state and local health departments, California Coastal Commission, counties, cities and other interested parties) to adopt regulations or standards for onsite wastewater systems. These regulations are not yet established and we do not anticipate that the statewide regulations will be adopted in the near future. Also, we do not anticipate that the statewide regulations (when adopted) will replace the need for Basin Plan criteria for onsite systems. If more stringent statewide regulations are adopted pursuant to AB885, then such regulations shall be incorporated into the implementation policy.

WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION: Staff reports, resolutions, notices of future meetings, and other related information is available on the Central Coast Water Board's website <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/> or by contacting the Sorrel Marks at 805/549-3695.